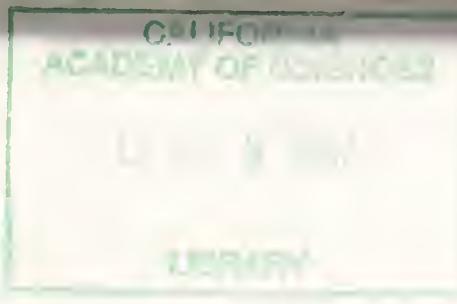


Golden Gate Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 79, No. 11 December 1997



## 'Tis the Season ... for Christmas Bird Counts

If I want for Christmas is....good weather, lots of birds, and fun fellow birders! In both Oakland and San Francisco, we're well along in planning for our annual CBC's.

The Oakland Count is on Sunday, December 21. Extending from Point Isabel in the north to south of Oakland Airport and from the Bay to Lafayette Reservoir, the Oakland count circle encompasses a variety of habitats that always produce a good number of species. Bird with a group or be a feeder watcher in the comfort of your own

home. We are still in need of a boat for the South Bay count area. Let Clyde and Joelle know if you or someone you know wants to take birders to search for birds south of the Bay Bridge.

The San Francisco Count is on Tuesday, December 30. The circle covers the northern San Francisco Peninsula from San Bruno to the Golden Gate. Join a team in one of the areas for a full day of birding; help for a few hours by covering your neighborhood park or square; be a midday birder for a few hours in downtown San Francisco; or watch in your backyard for as little as 30 minutes.

Both counts can always use more participants, so if you're interested but haven't signed up, phone the appropriate person listed below. But please call as soon as possible because neither count will be able to place counters at the last minute. If you call after mid-December, some areas may be filled, and you may not be able to count in your favorite area. If you have sent in a form but haven't received an assignment yet, you can expect to hear from us soon. We look forward to seeing you in the field and at the count-day dinner.

### Join Us for a Volunteer Workday

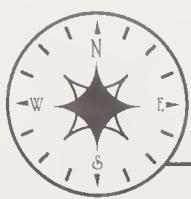
The GGAS East Bay Conservation Committee is organizing a volunteer workday at Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline. Wetlands are being restored and created at this East Bay Regional Park (see the October 1997 issue of the *Gull*), and all are invited to contribute to this wonderful project. In conjunction with the East Bay Regional Parks District we will spend an afternoon removing exotic cordgrass. This alien plant competes with our native vegetation and is less inviting to the Clapper Rail and shorebirds than are native wetland plants.

The event will be held on **Saturday, January 24, 1998**. The fun will begin at 1:00 p.m. and we will remove cordgrass until we are tired or 4:00 p.m. (whichever comes first).

Mark your calendars now, and look in the January *Gull* for further information.

Oakland Contacts:  
Joelle Buffa & Clyde Morris  
(510) 494-1098

San Francisco Contact:  
Alan Hopkins (415) 664-0983



# Field Trips Calendar

**G**A S field trips are conducted by experienced birders who wish to share their knowledge and love of birds with others. All trips are free of charge (except for entrance fees that may be charged by regional, state, or national parks) and are open to everyone, regardless of membership in the National Audubon Society or Golden Gate chapter.

## SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6 & 7 SACRAMENTO WILDLIFE REFUGES.

On Saturday, we will meet at 9:00 a.m. in the visitors' parking lot at the Sacramento Wildlife Refuge. To get there from I-5, take the Norman Rd. exit (just north of the Glenn Co. line) and follow signs to the refuge. See November *Gull* for other details. Leaders: Steve and Renee Margolin. (916) 342-6905. \$

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6 BERKELEY AQUATIC PARK.

Meet at 9 a.m. for this half-day trip. Directions: heading West on Ashby, turn right on 7th Street, right again on Folger, left on Hollis, right on 67th (crossing the railroad tracks) and finally, right onto Bay St. Bay will pass over Ashby on a bridge. You will see the two smaller ponds on your left and a seabird rehabilitation center on your right. Go straight and park in the small parking lot. See November *Gull* for other details. Leader: Rusty Scalf (510) 595-8319

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 STRYBING ARBORETUM.

Meet at 8 a.m. at the front gate of the Arboretum (9th Ave. and Lincoln Way). See January 4th trip for other details. Leader: Allan Ridley (415) 566-3241.

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10 MINI-TRIP TO LAKE MERRITT, OAKLAND.

Meet at the Rotary Science Center at 9:30 a.m. Go east on Grand Ave. to Lake Merritt. Continue to the Rotary Science Center (on the right just beyond the duck pond). This is a good opportunity to review waterfowl. Beginners welcome. Lunch optional. Rain cancels trip. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301 and Jean-Marie Spoelman.

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21 OAKLAND CBC

## TUESDAY DECEMBER 30 SAN FRANCISCO CBC

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 3 PALO ALTO BAYLANDS.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. Take Hwy. 101 south to Palo Alto; exit at Embarcadero and drive east toward the airport and the Baylands Nature Center. Continue beyond the airport to the duck pond (on the left) and park at the east end. Bring lunch, scope, and clothes appropriate for rain and mud. We should see waterfowl, rails, and shorebirds. Trip will end about mid-afternoon.

Leader: Dan Murphy (415) 564-0074. (\*)

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 4 STRYBING ARBORETUM.

Meet at 8 a.m. at the front gate of the Arboretum (9th Ave. and Lincoln Way) for this regular 1st Sunday of the month half-day trip. The Strybing Arboretum is a delightful section of Golden Gate Park, with several "microhabitats" attracting a varied array of resident, migrant, and vagrant birds. Beginners and all others welcome. Leader: Allan Ridley (415) 566-3241.

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 4 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT WRAP-UP!

Meet at Merrie Way above the Cliff House at 8:00 a.m. We will look for highlights found, as well as species missed, on the San Francisco Christmas Bird Count. Bring lunch and liquids. We will bird until about 3:00 p.m. The itinerary will be determined at the last minute. Carpooling would be helpful. Leader: Alan Hopkins. (415) 664-0983. (\*)

## WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14 MINI-TRIP TO ARROWHEAD MARSH.

Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the marsh. Take Hwy 880 (Nimitz) to the Hegenberger Rd. exit. Drive west to Doolittle Drive and turn right. Go a short distance and turn right again onto Swan Way. Turn left after a block and follow the sign to the marsh. Beginners and all welcome. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301 and Jean-Marie-Spoelman.

## Field Trip Reports

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 17 UPPER SAN LEANDRO RESERVOIR, MORAGA.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the Valle Vista staging area for a half-day trip. Take Hwy 24 to Orinda and exit on Moraga Hwy. Continue approximately 4 miles to Canyon Road. Turn right at the traffic signal and continue 1.2 miles to the Valle Vista staging area on the left. Grassy hills, pines, oaks and open water provide varied habitat for land birds and waterfowl. Bring water. Rain cancels.  
Leader: Bob Lewis (510) 845-5001. (\*)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 1997 SANDHILL CRANES!

We will go to the San Joaquin Delta to see our wintering sandhill cranes. These are members of the *Grus canadensis tabida* subspecies, the greater sandhill crane. There are only about 7,000 cranes in the Central Valley population. They are among the largest of the sandhills, standing over 1 meter tall with a wingspan of 2 meters. They will make their clacking sounds, and they will dance before our eyes. It will be a sight worthy of photography. We will also see ducks, swans, and other wintering birds. Expect icy, damp, and foggy weather. Wind possible. Gloves recommended. We'll buy lunch at some gourmet spot near Isleton; too cold to picnic. Due to limited parking, participation will be by reservation only. The number of cars will be limited. Call leader, Harry Fuller, to reserve a spot and for meeting time and location. (415) 668-8229. (\*)

**Yosemite National Park, May 29-June 1, Dave Quady and Bob Lewis:** Highlights for 19 participants were 30 minutes observing a Northern Pygmy Owl hunting, during which time it caught 2 mice, "killer views" of a Great Gray Owl, and a displaying Calliope Hummingbird. **Yuba Pass/Sierra Valley, June 14, 15, Peter Allen:** Most of the Sierra specialties were seen by 32 participants, including Black-backed Woodpecker, American Dipper, and Vesper Sparrow, on this trip which ended with sensational views of an adult Swainson's Hawk soaring above. **Lassen National Park, June 26 -29, Dan Murphy:** 95 species, including Black and Vaux's Swift, were seen on this trip. Although none of the 34 or so participants saw every bird, all had a great time. **Hayward Shoreline, August 16, Lew Cooper:** A Greater Yellowlegs landed right next to a Lesser Yellowlegs for a full and direct comparison only 50 feet from the 24 participants. There were many hundreds of shorebirds, normal for Lew for this time at this location. **Land's End to Lake Merced, September 1, Harry Fuller:** This trip features a fine mix of ocean, forest, and freshwater birds only a bus ride away for many city dwellers. Highlights included 4 species of flycatchers (Willow, Pacific-slope, Ash-throated, and Black Phoebe), many Western Tanagers which are only briefly in the area, and an enthusiastic group of 35 birders, including at least 3 first-timers. **Alameda South Shore, September 10, Anna Wilcox and Jean-Marie Spoelman:** 21 participants saw impressive numbers of shorebirds (e.g., 200 Black-bellied Plover) on this trip, which also featured 6 Red Knots, 7 Elegant Terns, 2 Common Terns, and a Common Murre. **Coyote Hills Regional Park, September 13, Rusty Scalf and Bob Lewis:** 60 species were seen on this half-day trip by 17 participants. Five flycatcher species were seen: Western Wood-peewee, Dusky Flycatcher(!), 3 Pacific-slope Flycatchers, and 5 Black and 1 Say's Phoebe. Regrets extended to those who could not get to the park due to the I-80 back-up. **Redwood Regional Park, September 14, Rusty Scalf:** Forest habitat is difficult for group birding, but 11 participants were able to at least hear the song or call of Golden-crowned Kinglet, Swainson's Thrush, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Unusual for Rusty at this location, no woodpeckers were seen. **Golden Gate Park, September 17, Hugh Cotter:** This weekday birding break during the peak of the fall migration was enjoyed by 15 participants. Migrant warblers seen included Yellow, Black-throated Gray, Hermit, and Wilson's. We will try to schedule more mid-week trips in San Francisco. □

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 25 LAKE MERRITT.

Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Grand Ave. and El Embarcadero by the Greek Colonade. This is an excellent opportunity to observe wintering ducks and grebes at close range, and to study their field identification. This trip is especially recommended for beginners and is wheelchair accessible. Bring binoculars, scope, and field guide if you have them. Trip ends at

noon. Rain cancels. Leader: Joan Zawaski (415) 621-2424 days; (510) 530-2427 eve. (\*) □

Trips marked with a (\$) go to parks or other sites which require an entrance fee. Carpooling arrangements will be attempted for trips marked with a (\*). See below. Problems, etc.: If you need a ride or can take a passenger, if you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, if you have suggestions for trips, or If you are interested in leading a trip, call Lillian Fujii (510) 236-4167, Field Trips Committee Chair.



**I**magine having your hand and your mouth combined into one instrument. Odd, yes. But birds' bills (or beaks) are just that combination. With its bill, a bird can reach almost every part of its body to scratch, to preen and to keep its feathers clean, so vital to its existence. The bill can also be used for caressing a mate, attacking an enemy or rival, collecting nesting material, or building a nest. Most importantly, the beak is used for securing food and breaking food into manageable bites.

From a birdwatcher's vantage, the bill is a key to identification, especially when some species are similarly colored and marked as with the Fox Sparrow and the Hermit Thrush, both in our winter gardens. The Fox Sparrow has the bill of a seed eater while the Hermit Thrush has a sharp bill for probing for worms and insects.

First, the bill is in two parts: an upper and a lower mandible. These two bony extensions of the skull are covered by a horny or leathery sheath made of the same material as our fingernails (keratin). Nostril holes are obvious in

all but a few species of birds. When the bill becomes worn, new keratin replaces the areas that flaked away; sometimes broken bills will actually "grow out." If abnormalities occur, the consequences are dire because feeding could be impossible. There are all sorts of specific appendages among various birds such as a "tooth" at the bill's tip; knobs, shields, or throat pouches that develop during breeding season; ceres (brightly-colored "saddles" at the base the beaks of hawks, eagles, falcons, and vultures).

As birders, we should know some of the terms used to describe bills. Adjectives such as long (notably longer than the head), short, narrow, broad, pointed, straight, and curved are easy. Here are more technical terms:

**Compressed** - when higher than wide for a good part of the length, as in kingfishers

**Depressed** - when wider than high, as in ducks

**Recurved** - when curved upward, as in godwits

**Decurved** - when curved downward, as in curlews

**Terete** - when neither compressed nor depressed, but circular, as in the round bill of hummingbirds

**Straight** - when not out of line with the head's axis, as in bitterns

**Spatulate** - wide and flat at the tip, as in spoonbills

**Beveled** - chisel-shaped at the tip, as in woodpeckers

Pelicans, flamingoes, skimmers,

and crossbills have such bizarre-shaped bills that just one adjective fails to describe them!

Most birds' bills are black, but bills appear in most any color. Indeed, among some toucans the bill is the most colorful part of the body. Some birds change bill color with the season: starlings and American Robins sport yellow bills in breeding season and a dark brown bill in fall, while the reverse is true of the bobolink and the House Sparrow. The olive-yellow bill of the Evening Grosbeak becomes bright apple green in breeding season.

Specialized bills are the equivalent of eating utensils. The strong, hooked bills of raptors, owls, and gulls tear large prey into smaller pieces. Shorebirds probe the sand for small invertebrates and mollusks, while snipes and woodcocks have extremely sensitive soft, flexible bill tips for "feeling" subterranean goodies. Stabbing is the technique used by anhingas, herons, cranes, and rails to catch fish and is akin to the spearing method used by Western Grebes. Finches have perfected the husking of seeds for meals while ducks, geese, swans, and flamingoes strain vegetable matter out of water and mud through serrated bills.

Isn't Mother Nature marvelous? With such a variety of bills all species of birds are not competing for the same foods. There's something for everyone. Ah! The wonder of nature!



## Egrets to Help at X-mas Count

by John Poole

The Chickadee Club at Jefferson Elementary School in Berkeley was a great success last year with about 400 children and parents participating in winter and spring bird walks at Tilden and at the Berkeley Marina.

The walks were led by volunteer birders who are Jefferson School parents and by members of GGAS. Groups are limited to 5 or 6 children who must be

accompanied by an adult. There are also 3 levels to the Chickadee Club: Chickadees, Robins, and Egrets. This year I would like to involve the Egrets in the Oakland Christmas Bird Count. I would pair 2 or 3 children with an adult volunteer for the morning of the count. Each group will be assigned a portion of the count area and will thoroughly explore and record the birds they find there.

The children who participate will not only have a great educational experience, but will be contributing to an important exercise in data collecting. This is the best recipe for learning.

Would you please consider becoming a Chickadee Club volunteer this year? The actual commitment in time is minimal, the rewards are great. We need volunteers not only for the morning of the count, but also for 1 or 2 walks in January and April. Please call me at (510) 549-0784.

## Tropical Ornithology Course

by Joelle Buffa & Clyde Morris

Last year the Golden Gate Audubon Society Board of Directors generously provided a paid scholarship for a Latin American student to attend the first Tropical Ornithology Course held in Veracruz, Mexico, in June and July 1996. After reviewing the "Proceedings" published as a result of this course, we are confident that this money was well spent.

Eighteen students from nine countries attended the six-week course. All had a background in biological sciences, and most worked for government agencies, universities, or environmental organizations in their home countries. The course taught the basics of ornithological theory, practical aspects of studying birds in the tropics, and management applications.

The topics studied by the students were varied and intriguing. "Why Do Birds Nesting in Tropical Forests and Deserts Have Larger Clutches than Temperate Forest Nesters?", "The Relationship Between Bird Diversity, Tree Characteristics, and Epiphytes", and "Vegetation Preferences of Woodpeckers in Two Disturbed Habitat Types" are just a sample of the wide range of topics that the students wrote papers on. If 18 students could investigate 50 such topics in just 6 weeks, just think what they will accomplish when they return home!

Golden Gate Audubon Society is prominently acknowledged in the "Proceedings" of the course. If you'd like to read a copy, contact Joelle or Clyde at (510) 494-1098. You'll have to brush up on your Spanish, because only the Abstracts are written in English. If you'd like to read a copy, contact Joelle or Clyde at (510) 494-1098.

## Gifts and Bequests

### Gifts and Bequests

Charlotte Nolan

### Memorial:

Leslie Doughty in memory of Eli Holst

The Society welcomes gifts in general or gifts in honor of or in memory of relatives and friends. Such gifts will be used as specified by the donor or, if unspecified, at the discretion of the GGAS Board of Directors. This includes their use of general GGAS activities or for special programs of the Society. Please send your gift in the form of a check made out to Golden Gate Audubon Society, 2550 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702. All gifts are tax deductible. The Society is also appreciative of any bequests. Such bequests should specify as recipient the Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. All gifts, donations and bequests will be acknowledged in *The Gull*, as well as personally on behalf of the Society by the Secretary.

# Help Your Golden Gate Audubon Society while Giving that Perfect Gift

Yes, it's once again the holiday season. If you're like most of us, finding reasonable, affordable gifts for loved ones and friends can be a real problem. Well, we've got an answer for you!

Give your loved ones and friends a gift subscription to the National Audubon Society. When you give them such a gift, they also automatically become members of the Golden Gate Audubon Society and will receive our newsletter, *The*

## Golden Gate Audubon Society

### Membership Application

- Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local chapter: **Golden Gate Audubon Society**

*Please send Audubon Magazine and my membership to the address below:*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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### National Audubon Society

\*Audubon Magazine \**Gull* Newsletter \*Local Chapter Activities  
Introductory Membership ..... \$20.00  
Please make checks payable to: **National Audubon Society**

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\**Gull* Newsletter \*Chapter Activities  
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### Mail either check to:

Golden Gate Audubon Society  
2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G  
Berkeley, CA 94702  
phone (510) 843-2222

*Gull* and they will be welcome on all of our field trips and other activities.

How will this help GGAS? Usually when people join the National Audubon Society, their local chapter (e.g. GGAS) receives \$5.50 of the total subscription rate. However, if new members join through the Golden Gate Audubon Society office, GGAS receives \$15 out of that subscription. Thus, when you give a gift Audubon subscription through the Golden Gate Audubon Office, we will get \$15 of that \$20 gift subscription.

GGAS depends on our share of your membership dues to publish the *Gull*, to run an office and small dedicated staff, and to fight the good fight for preserving our natural world.

So please think of giving an Audubon subscription as a holiday gift. It means a lot to us, and an Audubon membership makes a great gift.

To give a gift subscription, please use the application form on this page. Put the name of the person receiving your gift on the application form and send it and your check to the GGAS Office, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702.

Make sure we have your name and address, and we will send a card to the person receiving the gift telling them that you have given them a gift subscription to Audubon.

Make it a happy holiday season for your loved ones and GGAS. Many Thanks.



# Inspiring the Young

by Maria D. Allen, PAS Vice-President

The Panama Audubon Society is transforming itself from a recreational bird watching society into a conservation organization focusing on birds and their habitats. We believe, however, that if our conservation efforts are to succeed we must reach the younger generation. They are the future, and they hold the key to the protection of the birds we love and the habitats that sustain them. This is why PAS has focused so much of its energy towards the young.

October was the month of the 5th International Bird Festival. Its activities involved several youth groups from the interior of Panama. The young adults in the province of Coclé attended lectures and searched for the Grasshopper Sparrow (which is now feared extinct in Panama) in the grasslands of Coclé. Peace Corps volunteers in the remote areas conducted bird education pro-

grams, and the children from the Chagres National Park region participated in a drawing contest and learned about Harpy Eagles and how they can help in their protection.

Our junior Audubon activities take children and their parents out to the field where they can experience and learn about nature firsthand. While participating in fun-filled events, they are more likely to strengthen their bonds with the land and its creatures and join the ranks of those who will preserve the environment.

We have another exciting youth project for 1998 - the youth Ornithologists program in cooperation with the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. High school students from Philadelphia are scheduled to visit Panama next April where they will be joined by Panamanian students and PAS volunteers. The group

will spend a week together participating in several cultural and hands-on scientific activities. Then,

depending on available funds, the Panamanian students may have the opportunity to go to Philadelphia and continue the program at the Academy during the summer.

All of these programs not only involve our members, but also help us to educate others in the country about the wonderful birds around us, the threats they

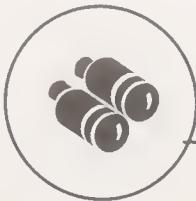
## Panama Committee Meeting

Among the many great things that GGAS is involved in is its relationship with Panama's Audubon Society. To find out more about this great international connection or to be part of it, come to the Panama Committee's next meeting.

It will be held on Monday, January 19, at 7:30 p.m. The meeting will take place at Committee Chair Miles McKey's home at 76 Hillcrest Road, in Berkeley. For more information, please call Miles at (510) 652-5854.

face, and how we can help them and their habitats. One of our biggest aids is the Books and Binoculars program, which has placed binoculars and the book "A Guide to the Birds of Panama" by Ridgley and Gwynne in the hands of many young adults in the interior of Panama. For them, the "brown birds" of before now have beautifully colored plumage and a name to go by. We hope the newly found feathered friends will capture the imagination of the kids, and make them want to protect their avian treasure.summer.





# Observations

by Collin G. Murphy, Ph.D.

September 21 to October 22

The first official weeks of autumn were characterized by the first real, but short-lived, rain of the season and the timely return of several regular migrant species. Warbler sightings were abundant, and high numbers of several unusual visitants were recorded.

Special news for those birders interested in the process of species formation: recent DNA analyses reported in the Sept. 17, 1997 issue of *Science* by Klicka and Zink indicate that the time of divergence of some of our most familiar, closely-related passerine species occurred much earlier than previously supposed. Extreme examples are the Blue Jay and Stellar's Jay, which apparently did not become separated due to recent glaciations; rather, they may have been individual species for more than 5 million years! (Is that why they seem so arrogant?) Here's to those venerable species! A few others with similarly ancient origins will be mentioned as they come up in this month's observations report.

## Grebes to Ducks

Several Red-necked Grebes were spotted at PRNS, MRN, Sept. 22 (RS). Numbers of Black-footed Albatross were low compared to the previous period, with a total of 16 reported from Monterey Bay, MTY, and Cordell Banks, SON, pelagic trips (MR, AH, DLSh), and no other albatross species were observed. Five **Manx Shearwaters** were reported from the Farallones dur-

ing the first weeks covered by this report (KH, SR). Another individual was seen on the Monterey Bay pelagic trip Sept. 27 (MR and MPRBA). High counts for shearwaters offshore were 1100 for Buller's, 1000 for Black-vented, 550 for Pink-footed, 5 for Flesh-footed, and 2 for Short-tailed Shearwaters (DN, DLSh). The first Least Storm-Petrels of the year were recorded from a Monterey Bay pelagic trip at the beginning of Oct. (MPRBA). A total of 25 Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels and one Wilson's Storm-Petrel were also reported. The large group of 602 Brown Pelicans at Stone Lagoon, HUM, Oct. 19 bodes well for the continued recovery of this species (BC). The Little Blue Heron reported last month remained in Marshall, MTY, as of Oct. 13 (LH). Timely fall arrivals included a Hooded Merganser Sept. 24 in San Mateo (MR), and single White-fronted Geese Sept. 25, SM (BM) and Oct. 12-13, SCL (MR, JO) as well as 5 of the geese near Ft. Bragg, MEN, Oct. 16 (DT). Harlequin Ducks were reported from Contra Costa, Marin, Mendocino, Monterey, and Humboldt counties (DSc, DWr, JCo, DT, AH). Single Oldsquaws were found at Brooks Island, CC (DSc), Abbott's Lagoon, MRN (DR), and Klopp Lake, Arcata, HUM (MM). Blue-winged Teal were present in good numbers and Eurasian Wigeons were found in SCL (MR), MRN (LH, LC), and HUM (LB) counties. A fascinating duck report was that of 97 Wood Ducks at the appropriate-

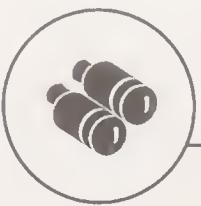
ly-named Wood Duck Ponds in W. Sacramento, YOL, Oct 14 (LE).

## Kites to Alcids

An impressive 70 White-tailed Kites were counted at PRNS Sept. 21 (RS). This number indicates an improved status for the kite population, which has fluctuated widely in recent decades. Five Broad-winged Hawks passed through right on schedule: two on Sept. 27 at Hawkwatch Hill, MRN (DB); one each at PRNS on Sept. 21 MRN, (RS), Phipps Ranch, SM, Sept. 21 (RT), and in Pescadero, SM, Oct. 15 (JA). Ferruginous Hawks were seen Sept. 21 at PRNS, MRN (RS), Oct. 1 at Mt. Davidson, SF (JM), and Oct. 9 at Little Panoche R, SBT (DLSh). There were two late Swainson's Hawks in W. Sacramento, YOL, Oct. 14 (LE). Five Merlin were observed together Sept. 26 at Nunes Ranch, MRN (RS). Prairie Falcons again visited coastal MTY, this time at Big Sur Oct. 4 and at Pt. Pinos Oct. 16 (MPRBA). One American Golden Plover was reported from SM (SR). A total of 11 Pacific Golden Plovers were found in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Yolo, Humboldt, and Marin counties (BM, MS, SA, ABB, JMo). Last year during a similar period only one American Golden Plover but no Pacific Golden Plovers were reported, whereas there were 16 and 11 of each species, respectively, recorded in 1995. Pectoral Sandpipers, another usual fall

*Continued on page 10*

# Warbler sightings



# Observations

Continued from page 8

arrival, were noted in Sonoma Sept. 20 (MP), San Mateo, Sept. 25 (BM), and at PRNS, MRN, Sept. 29 (TEI). Four Pectoral Sandpipers were in Santa Clara Oct. 13 (ME). A Stilt Sandpiper was in Sunnyvale, SCL Oct. 2 (PM), and there were two more at Alviso, SCL, Oct. 18 (MM).

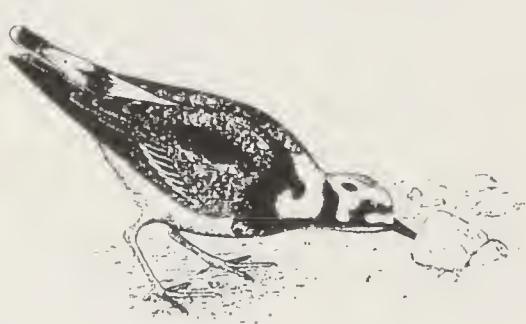
The **White-rumped Whimbrel** (the Siberian *variegatus* subspecies) seen first on Sept. 8 and reported in last month's Observations was found again on Tunitas Creek, SM, Sept. 21 (RT). A group of 364 Red Knots was counted at Ravenswood Preserve, SM, on Sept. 23 (SR). There was an unusual inland sighting of a Sabine's Gull at the Stockton Sewage Ponds, SJ, Oct. 2 (DY). An adult **Lesser Black-Backed Gull** was found near the Alviso Marina, SCL, Oct. 11-19. This bird is likely to be the same one seen the last two winters (MM, JMo, ST, BR, NW). This European gull is an extremely rare fall and winter visitant, and most records are from S. California (Small, 1994). There were still 14 Black Skimmers at Charleston Slough Trail, SCL, through at least mid-October (PM, JMo). A breeding-plumaged **Thick-billed Murre**, a mostly Arctic pelagic species, was seen near the Farallones on Sept. 30 (PP fide KH). This murre is a very rare fall and winter visitant, and most records are from Monterey Bay (Small, 1994). An impressive group of 245 Rhinoceros Auklets was seen on the Oct. 17 Cordell Banks trip (DN).

## Doves to Phainopepla

One report of a **White-winged Dove** came from Wright's Beach, SON (DN), and another from PRNS, MRN (RS). These doves are rare and irregular along the N. California coast in fall and winter, with only one seen during a comparable period in 1995 and two in 1996. A Burrowing Owl, rare north of Marin, was found at Humboldt Bay, HUM, Oct. 12 (ABB). 15 Vaux's Swifts (usually found over woodland) and one White-throated Swift were observed at Hawkwatch Hill, MRN, Sept. 27 (DB). An unusual visitor Oct. 7 at Drake's Beach, MRN, was a juvenile female Costa's Hummingbird (RS, RH, JiW, EB). There was a high count of 12 Tropical Kingbirds reported over the area. Most unusual was the **Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher**. This extremely rare fall transient was found in Owl Canyon, Bodega, SON, Sept. 27-28 (DN, JMo, MR, DS), and probably represents only the third or fourth N. California record. Most previous records are from Southern California. There were single Least Flycatchers seen at PRNS, MRN, on several occasions (RS, RCu, LL, CL, AD), and

Willow Flycatchers were at AMSP and Carmel R., MTY, Sept. 23 (MPRBA) as well as at Panoche R, SBT, Oct. 7 (DLSh). Three Bank Swallows were at Coyote Creek, SCL, Sept. 29 (MR). These swallows are declining as a breeding species in California because of habitat destruction (Small, 1994). An American Dipper was observed singing near Gazos Creek Road, SM, Sept. 25 (BM).

The biggest bird news of the period was the prolonged visit of a **Dusky Warbler** to Antonelli Pond in Santa Cruz (SCZ). This "Old World Warbler" species belongs to the same subfamily as the kinglets and gnatcatchers and is seen extremely rarely in the fall. It was found repeatedly from Oct. 14-22 (ST, DS, JMe, TE, NW, MR, MPRBA). Late word is that the same individual may have been refound in the vicinity Oct. 24. Amazingly, another **Dusky Warbler** was banded at Palomarin, MRN, Oct. 18 (RS). The last days of September brought the noteworthy reports of a **Gray-cheeked Thrush** at the Pt. Reyes Lighthouse, PRNS, MRN (CC, RS). Almost all the records of this very rare fall transient are from Pt. Reyes or the Farallones. A first report of the Varied Thrush for the season also came from PRNS, MRN Sept. 28 (PLT). Another nice experience was the **Veery** seen by at least 40 lucky birders at PRNS Oct. 3 (RS et al). A Brown Thrasher visited Pescadero Creek, SM, Oct. 19 (RT). Sage Thrashers were seen at the Purisima R., SM, Sept. 28 (RT), on the Farallones the week of Sept.



30 (PP fide KH), and at Redwood N.P., DN, Oct. 18 (DF). A Red-throated Pipit flew over Andrew Molera SP (AMSP), MTY, Sept. 29 (MPRBA), and another flyby was over Doran Beach, SON, Oct. 20 (RS). The fifth Farallones record of a Phainopepla occurred during the week preceding Sept. 23 (KH).

## Vireos to Finches

A Yellow-green Vireo was observed Sept. 25-28 at the Phipps Ranch, SM (BM). Another report came from Big Sur, MTY, Oct 1 (MPRBA). Two were also found in Humboldt County in late Oct. (KN, GH). Typically only two or three observations of this tropical species occur each year in California during fall migration. A Plumbeous Vireo was at the Carmel R., MTY, Sept. 28 (MPRBA). Two Red-eyed Vireos were found at the Carmel R., MTY, during the first week in October (MPRBA). There were large numbers of unusual wood warblers seen during the busy fall migratory period, as indicated on the chart. Not included were 22 sightings of the Palm Warbler and 6 reports of the Nashville Warbler.

A Blue Grosbeak was sighted at AMSP, MTY, Sept. 28 and another at Pt. Pinos, MTY, Oct. 16 (MPRBA). Single Indigo Buntings were sighted in W. Sacramento, YOL, Sept. 21 (MPe) and at the Rail Ponds, SON, Oct. 21 (DN), and there were 4 reports of Lark Buntings in Monterey, Marin, and Mendocino counties (MPRBA, RS, GS) and on the Farallones (KH). Also seen on the Farallones was a

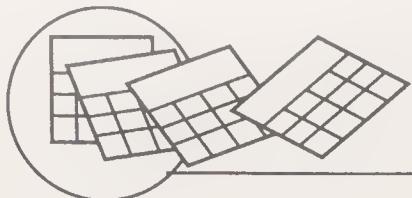
**Painted Bunting** (KH), exceedingly rare in N. California (most records are from the Farallones; Small, 1994). There were several sightings of Clay-colored Sparrows from Marin, Monterey, Santa Cruz, and Alameda counties and at the Farallones. More atypical were the reports of three rare fall transient sparrows: Single Vesper Sparrows were seen in San Mateo, Monterey, Santa Cruz, Marin, and Humboldt counties (RT, MPRBA, DWr, JA, ABB). By Oct. 13, some Vesper Sparrows had returned to their usual wintering spot near Winters, YOL (SH). A Black-throated Sparrow was seen at Tunitas Creek, SM (RT), and an American Tree Sparrow was at Lampere Dunes, HUM (KN). Right on schedule Sept. 26, six Chestnut-collared Longspurs arrived at PRNS, MRN (RS). A total of approximately 20 Lapland Longspurs was observed in Monterey (MPRBA), Marin (MP, JMo), Mendocino (DT), San Mateo (RT), Sonoma (RM) and Humboldt counties (EE, ABB). These two sister species of longspurs are now believed to have diverged 4.5 million years ago. Four Bobolinks were reported from Monterey, Mendocino and Marin counties (MPRBA, DT, JMo). A rare Rusty Blackbird was found at PRNS, MRN Oct 19 (RS); there are usually only 4-5 records of this species during fall and winter in N. California. A Baltimore Oriole, rare but regularly seen in the fall, was reported at Princeton Inn, SM, Sept. 23 (RT) and another in

Santa Clara ,SCL, Oct. 17-21 (MF). Life listers will be happy to hear that this species is now reported to have separated from its sister species, Bullock's Oriole, over 2 million years ago (lumpers, how about that?). An Orchard Oriole, not often seen north of Marin, was found at Bodega Bay, SON, Sept. 24-26 and 28 (DN). Other single birds were near San Gregorio Creek, SM, Oct. 1 (RT) and the Carmel R., MTY, Oct. 4 (MPRBA). A total of 5 Lawrence's Goldfinches were observed at Phipps Ranch in SM Sept. 27 and Oct. 4. (BM, RT).

### Abbreviations for Observers:

SA, Steve Abbott; JA, Jean Adams; DA, Dick Ashford; LB, Louise Bacon-Ogden; EB, Ellen Blustein; BB, Bob Brandriff; DB, Dixie Burkhardt; BC, Brian Cariss; JC, Josiah Clark; LC, Luke Cole; JCo, Jesse Conklin; CC, Chris Corben; HC, Hugh Cotter; RCu, Rig Currie; PD, Pierre Delastre; AD, Ann Dewart; TE, Todd Easterla; ME, Mark Eaton; LE, Leo Edson; AE, Al Eisner; EE, Elias Elias; TEI, Tedd Eliot; MF, Mike Feighner; DF, David Fix; TG, Tom Gardali; HG, Helen Green; KH, Keith Hansen; SH, Steve Hampton; GH, Gjon Hazard; MH, Mike Healy; AH, Alan Hopkins; RH, Rich Hoyer; LH, Lisa Hug; AJ, Al Jaramillo; PLT, Peter La Tourette; JL, John Levine; LL, Leslie Lieurance; CL, Cindy Lieurance; CLo, Calvin Lou; MM, Mike Mammoser; JoM, John Mariani; RM, Roger Marlow; JM, Jennifer Matkin; JMe, John Meyer; MMc, Mac McCormick; BM, Bert McKee; PM, Peter Metropulos; CM, Carol Miller; JMo, Joe Morlan; MMo, Mike Morris; DN, Dan Nelson; KN, Kristie Nelson; BN, Bill Noble; JO, Jon Osner; MP, Mike Parmeter; MPe, Michael Perone; PP, Peter Pyle; BR, Bob Reiling; DR, Don Reinberg; MR, Mike Rogers; SR, Steve Rottenborn; DS, Doug Shaw; DSc, Don Schmoldt; DLSH, Debra Love Shearwater; RS, Rich Stallcup; GS, Grace Steuer; MS, Mark Stevenson; SS, Sylvia Sykora; ST, Scott Terrill; RT, Ron Thorn; DT, Dorothy Tobkin; jiW, Jim White; DWr, Denise Wright; NW, Ned Wynn; DY, David Yee; BY, Bob Yutzy

**Abbreviations for Counties and Others**  
ALA, Alameda; CC, Contra Costa; DN, Del Norte; HUM, Humboldt; MRN, Marin; MEN, Mendocino; MTY, Monterey; SB, San Benito; SE, San Francisco; SJ, San Joaquin; SM, San Mateo; SCL, Santa Clara; SCZ, Santa Cruz; SON, Sonoma; YOL, Yolo; ABB, Arcata Bird Box (HUM Co.); AMSP, Andrew Molera State Park; GG, Golden Gate Park ; MPRBA, Monterey Peninsula Rare Bird Alert; PRNS, Point Reyes National Seashore



## Holiday Greetings and Thank You to Our Field Trip Leaders

The Golden Gate Audubon Society extends a holiday greeting to the many birders who have so generously given their time and shared their birding knowledge by leading field trips over the past years. Some of you may have moved out of the area or have taken on responsibilities that make it difficult to commit to a date more than 2 months in advance. But your contribution toward our chapter's efforts to provide educational and enjoyable outings for our members over the years is truly appreciate. The following leaders have led trips for GGAS since September 1996. We thank all of you, with special thanks to those who lead multiple trips during the year.

Leon Abrams, Ken Ackerman and Gloria Markowitz, Peter Allen, George Bing, Bill Bixby, Jeffrey Black, Chris Carpenter, Nancy Conzett, Lewis Cooper, Hugh Cotter, Peter Dramer, Leora



Feeaney, Allen Fish, Harry Fuller, David George, Bob Hogan, Alan Hopkins, Bob Lewis, Ron Lindeman, Steve and Renee Margolin, Dan Murphy, George Peyton, Lina Jane Prairie, Robin Pulich, Cathy Purchis, Dave Quady, David Rice, Allan Ridley, Jim Rowoth, Rusty Scalf, Jean-Marie Spoelman, Malcolm Sproul, Don Starks, Anna Wilcox, Cam Wolff, and Joan Zawaski.

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